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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*Politics Within the Communist High Command
in South Vietnam*

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21 December 1971
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
21 December 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Politics Within the Communist High
Command in South Vietnam

Introduction

Top level Communist cadres in South Vietnam have long been considered a highly efficient transmission belt for policies made in Hanoi. While the latest information reveals no significant decline in discipline within COSVN (the enemy's southern headquarters) or in COSVN's responsiveness to Hanoi, enough evidence is now at hand to indicate that parochialism and personal interests at the highest levels may at times put a brake on COSVN's reflexes. On several occasions the leadership has been slow to come up with a stop-gap response of its own when confronted with unexpected developments. One reason may have been its reluctance to act without specific guidance from Hanoi, but another could well have been the need to reconcile differences and to balance priorities within COSVN's inner circle.

Regional prejudices, for instance, are known to have played a role in bureaucratic jockeying within COSVN and may also have had an effect on policy discussions. Well-documented cases of tension within COSVN have mostly focused on problems of advancement and promotion, but some high-level cadres have been tentatively identified as holding views on political and military doctrine that are not entirely in line with official statements from Hanoi. In addition, there are often marked disparities between official North Vietnamese assessments of how the war is going and evaluations emanating from working staff in the south.

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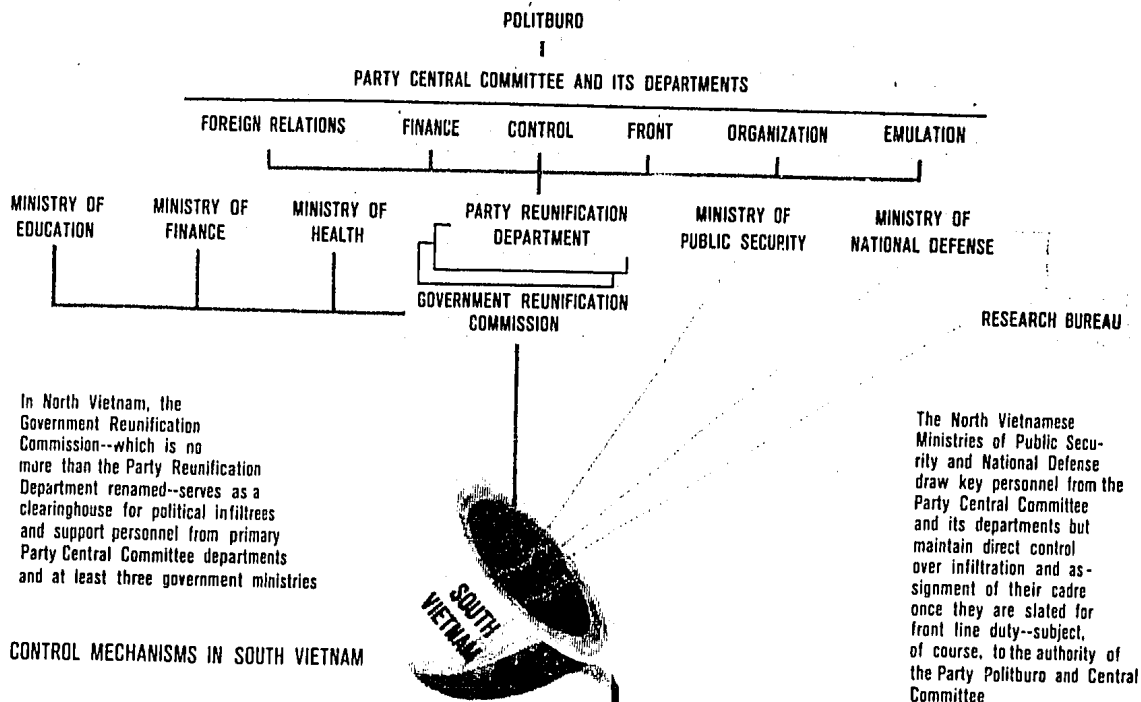
This memorandum does not suggest that the COSVN mechanism is beginning to break down, although it seems reasonable to assume COSVN will face additional strains as Communist fortunes in the South decline. Its main purpose is to organize and assess the tenuous and often conflicting evidence that exists on COSVN politics in order to provide a framework for further investigation and analysis.

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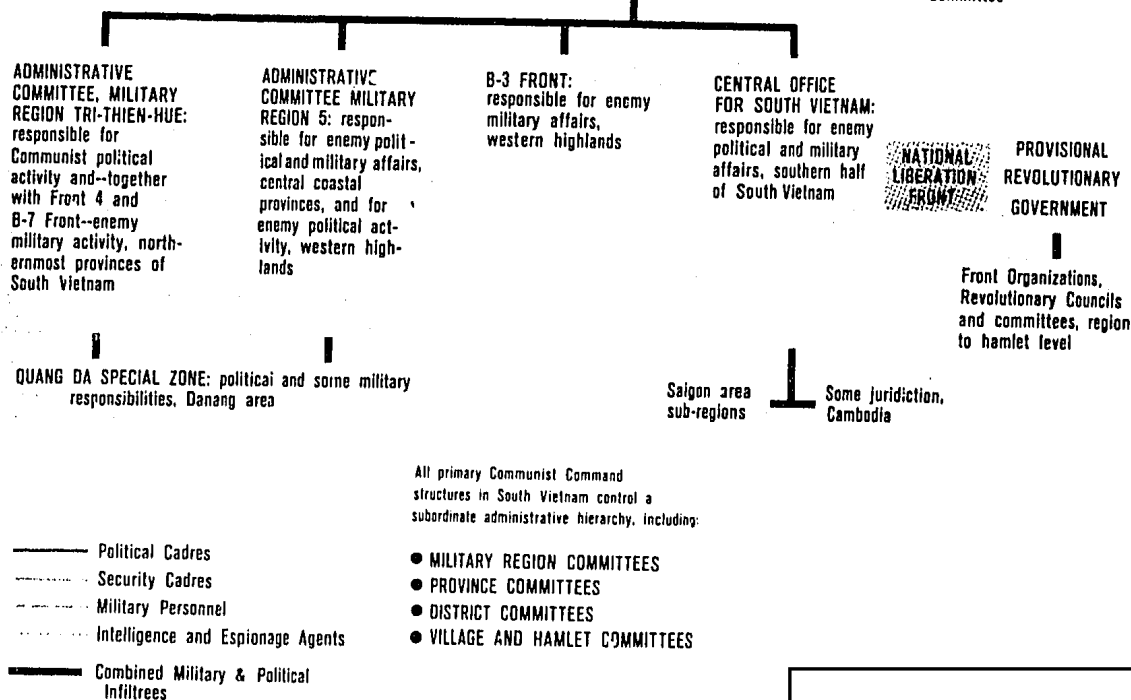
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NORTH VIETNAM'S CONTROL OF THE WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM

NORTH VIETNAMESE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT MECHANISM CONTROLLING THE WAR



● CONTROL MECHANISMS IN SOUTH VIETNAM



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The Apparatus

1. During the period of the Viet Minh resistance to the French, the Communist administrative map for all of Vietnam and for some fringe areas of Laos was broken down into so-called "inter-regions," three of which coincided roughly with the north, central and southern areas of South Vietnam itself. After the Geneva Accords, as Communist activity contracted, command responsibilities in South Vietnam devolved on the inter-regional committee for the southern part of the country, which eventually--with some modifications--emerged as COSVN (Central Office for South Vietnam).
2. Since its unveiling in 1961 COSVN has been the primary forum for policy deliberation among top-level cadres in the south and the leading element of the southern branch of the Vietnamese Workers (Communist) Party. Like the Party Central Committee in North Vietnam, it sits athwart an administrative hierarchy which includes party committees ranged from region to hamlet level; a parallel and generally inter-related military command structure; a formal front organization with related "mass" associations (the National Liberation Front), and a quasi-independent governmental apparatus (the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Three or four of COSVN's staff sections, including Security, Propaganda and Training, and Foreign Affairs, have apparently been given the additional label, "governmental ministry," since the surfacing of the Provisional Revolutionary Government in mid-1969.
3. Other independent administrative committees with military headquarters similar to COSVN have been created to guide political and military initiatives of the Communists in the two northernmost provinces of South Vietnam (Viet Cong Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue) and along the central coast (Viet Cong Military Region 5). In the vicinity of Da Nang responsibility for political activities--and perhaps for some local military action--devolves on the administrative apparatus of the Quang Da Special Zone. In the western highlands the Military Region 5 structure is responsible for coordinating the political struggle while military headquarters of the B-3 Front concentrates on military activity. Although technically responsible for military and political

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[redacted]

affairs only in the lower half of South Vietnam, COSVN personnel often serve concurrently on these other Communist command structures. This arrangement in effect welds the various headquarters into an interlocking directorate with country-wide jurisdiction.

4. [redacted] COSVN may recently have been designated the "Central Committee" of South Vietnam as part of an administrative shake-up that also produced new Communist "inter-regions" for the eastern, western, and northern portions of the country. The report has not been corroborated. Nevertheless, recent well-documented changes in low-level Communist command channels and administrative boundaries in the south may have had parallels in the upper echelons. The Communists are believed to be concerned over coordinating the various aspects of their expanded war effort. If steps have been taken to streamline COSVN's ties with the various regional commands, the impact of personal and political relationships within COSVN itself could be keenly felt down the line.

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5. COSVN's daily business is conducted by a three-man secretariat, the members of which also serve on a military affairs committee that, in effect, is COSVN's military headquarters. A large Central Committee should meet, according to party statutes, once or twice a year to pass on COSVN resolutions and any personnel changes in the more exclusive "Standing Committee" and in the secretariat. Since 1967, the secretariat has been headed by North Vietnamese politburo member Pahn Hung; its undersecretaries are Hai Van, a respected party mediator, and Muoi Cuc, an authority on propaganda and training. Their primary associates on the military affairs committee are Hoang Van Thai, commander in chief of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, his chief lieutenant Tran Van Tra, and executive officer Tran Luong. All six are believed to be members of the Central Committee of the North Vietnam Workers Party and could be expected to reflect its positions and respect its instructions.

6. The party leadership in Hanoi exerts formal influence on COSVN through four separate agencies. The Reunification Department, an integral part of the party hierarchy, serves as a clearinghouse in the assignment and infiltration of most political cadres. (National Reunification Commission" is the label which this agency

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wears in the governmental hierarchy.) On the government side Hanoi's Ministry of Defense supervises COSVN's military headquarters on behalf of the Central Committee. The ministry also keeps tabs on southern-based intelligence and espionage agents through its "Research Bureau." The Ministry of Public Security oversees Viet Cong security operatives who are largely responsible for mounting terrorist and counter-intelligence operations and policing the southern hierarchy from within. Since each of these agencies is also tied into the other Communist commands in the South with their complement of COSVN personnel, Hanoi's control over COSVN is in effect manifold.

7. Although Hanoi has numerous methods for influencing and working through COSVN, there is evidence that in producing its own top-level, formal directives the southern leadership may need time to act upon major shifts in North Vietnamese policy. Four months elapsed before COSVN disseminated its own guidelines on the thesis of protracted hit-and-run warfare which Hanoi had formulated in April 1969. During the four months, Hanoi's guidance was discussed and apparently debated and amended at various levels of the Communist structure in the south.

8. Recently, the Communists seemed more than a little slow in adjusting their tactics and indoctrination to the withdrawal of opposition candidates from South Vietnam's presidential elections and to the announcement of President Nixon's visit to China. In the face of unforeseen developments, COSVN's leaders may find themselves handicapped by their traditional dependence on Hanoi with neither the experience nor the independence to improvise immediate responses. At these junctures personal differences and factional alignments among them may emerge.

Bureaucratic and Regional Prejudices

9. The best documented controversies in COSVN have centered on regional or sectional prejudices and resultant complaints over favoritism within the bureaucracy. Reliable reports of cleavages along

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geographic lines began to accumulate as early as 1957, before COSVN had formally surfaced. During this period numerous northern-based regroupees and cadres who had remained in the south became exercised over what they saw as a tendency in Hanoi to reserve key promotions for native North Vietnamese. Their case was said to have been taken up in 1959 and again a year later at the historic 3rd Party Congress by an emerging party leader named Le Duan, who had served as head of the Communist apparatus in the south from 1951 to 1953 and possibly even longer. His intervention, by several accounts, resulted in a considerably better deal for the veterans on the front line and, according to one report, as many as 50 of these veterans may have been granted secret membership in the Central Committee during the 3rd Party Congress. (Le Duan was elected Party First Secretary of one Central Committee which has 68 publicly acknowledged full and alternate members.) As a result of his efforts, Le Duan reportedly won a following among the front-line cadres that persists.

10. The step-up in infiltration in the early 1960s apparently fueled still other regional prejudices within the COSVN. The assignment of many of the infiltrators to Central Vietnam reinforced speculation down the line that this area was being favored by planners in Hanoi. Traditionally there has been little love lost between Central Vietnamese and natives of the Saigon area and the delta, and their antagonism most likely carries over into the Communist hierarchy. Late in 1963, under the pressures of infiltration, this hostility reportedly broke into the open. Several COSVN figures from Saigon accused the Central Vietnam contingent of "bootlicking" and of monopolizing promotions. The centrists, backed by recent North Vietnamese arrivals, retaliated by mounting a campaign to oust Tran Bach Dang, their frequent critic, from his post as chief of COSVN's Propaganda and Training Section. Whether they were successful is not known, but perhaps significantly Dang was soon after reassigned to the position of secretary of the Saigon City Committee. From this vantage point he and his supporters reportedly have continued to snipe periodically at the men from Central Vietnam.

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COSVN LEADERS AND THEIR ALIASES

COSVN Secretariat

1. Pham Hung, also known as (aka) Bay Hong or Hung
2. Muoi Cuc, *aka* Nguyen Van Linh, Nguyen Van Cuc, Muoi Ut, Pham Cuc, Anh Muoi (possibly linked to Communist effort Cambodia)
3. Hai Van, *aka* Pham Xuan Thai, Nguyen Van Dang, Hai Rom, Va Van (Chief, COSVN Organization Section, Security Section or Propaganda and Training Section)

Additional Members of COSVN's Current Affairs Committee

4. Hoang Van Thai, *aka* Muoi Khang, Hoang Van Than, Ngo Quoc Binh, Hoang Xuan Thai (PLAF Commander)
5. Tran Luong, *aka* Hai Hau, Tran Phi, Tran Nam Trung, Vo Van Hoa, Hai (PLAF Deputy)
6. Tran Van Tra, *aka* Tran Nam Trung, Tu Chi (PLAF Deputy)
7. Tran Do, *aka* Tran Quoc Vinh, Chin Vinh (COSVN Political Officer)
8. Va Buong, *aka* Ba Huong, Nguyen Ban Buong, Ba Be ("Supervisor," COSVN Organization Section)
9. Sau Van, *aka* Nguyen Van Kiet, Chin Dung, Sau Dan, Phang Trong Dan (member, Saigon City Committee)
10. Hai Xe Ngua, *aka* So Le Van (Chief, COSVN Finance and Economy Section and Forward Supply Council)
11. Tran Bach Dang, *aka* Tu Meo, Tu Anh, Nam Quang (possibly Chief, Saigon City Committee)

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11. COSVN rivalries evidently took on an even more distinct north-south coloration in 1965 when the first large contingent of conventional North Vietnamese forces arrived. One apparent catalyst was Major General Tran Do, an alternate member of the North Vietnamese Party Central Committee, who was assigned to COSVN in 1965 as deputy political officer. Do immediately moved to place 12 of his proteges--all northerners--into positions critical to Hanoi's expanding role in the war. By 1967, his men reportedly controlled key posts in COSVN's Rear Service, Military Staff, and Political Affairs Departments.

12. If Tran Do did indeed pull off such a master stroke, he must have had the support of COSVN's chief at the time, General Nguyen Chi Thanh. A highly influential figure, Thanh served concurrently as COSVN Secretary, Chief Political Officer, and the People's Liberation Armed Forces commander in chief until his death in July 1967. Earlier, as a member of the politburo in North Vietnam, he had put himself on record as favoring strong party control over the military. As COSVN chief he may well have approved the Tran Do appointments as a move in the right direction.

13. Whatever their extent the personnel changes engineered by Tran Do apparently touched off a wave of complaints from southern cadres. Reportedly once again Le Duan intervened on their behalf.

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[redacted] to ensure the promotion of COSVN leaders who would be more sympathetic to southern interests. When Nguyen Chi Thanh died, Le Duan may well have been instrumental in the selection of fellow politburo member Pham Hung. A native southerner, Hung had served under Duan during the latter's tenure as chief of the southern apparatus and reportedly had a wide following of his own in the south. Soon after his appointment Hung removed one of Tran Do's men from the Rear Service Department, replacing him with a southerner. Hung's appointee, however, was by training an artillery officer and had little knowledge of logistics. As a result Tran Do's coterie allegedly has continued to handle the day-to-day operations of COSVN's rear services.

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14. Pham Hung's appointment as COSVN chief may have aggravated other bureaucratic and sectional tensions within the Communist command, though this is far from certain. It is known that immediately after the death of Nguyen Chi Thanh, undersecretary Muoi Cue-- who had served full time in the top COSVN position from 1962 to 1964--took over as interim chief of COSVN. Once Pham Hung arrived to assume his duties, Cuc was shifted once again to his old post of undersecretary.

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15. If so, the relation between Pham Hung and his first undersecretary could be viewed as an implicit confrontation between a Hanoi luminary and a front-line veteran. Though a native northerner, Cuc has been in the south almost constantly since he, Le Duan, and other Communist leaders escaped together from a French prison in 1945. His prolonged involvement in the war has almost certainly won him a following among those cadres who have put in a great deal of time in the south. Captured film strips show him to have been the center of much attention and enthusiasm at the ceremonies--well attended by front-line veterans--which unveiled the Communists' Provisional Revolutionary Government in mid-1969. By contrast, Pham Hung has ties back in the north, where he has the broad power base and even broader political interests. Ostensibly fifth in line in the party hierarchy he was closely identified with North Vietnamese economic policy following his initial tour in the south from 1945 to 1955.

16. There is no positive evidence, however, that Cuc is at odds with his nominal chief, let alone that Cuc has been on the skids. Tenuous indications suggest that he is in fact Pham Hung's equal, with responsibility for organizing and supervising the Communist infrastructure in Cambodia. Despite his prolonged absence from Hanoi, moreover, Cuc is apparently not without some political clout there.

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have been among the southern-based cadres who were

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secretly voted into the Party Central Committee in 1960. At Ho Chi Minh's funeral three years ago, he was included among the ranking guests. The most that can be deduced, then, is that the true power balance within the Secretariat remains hidden. Muoi Cuc and Pham Hung possibly share much of the authority, and Hai Van stands third in the pecking order. Whether this means that the two top leaders are active rivals is unknown, but it seems likely that slippage in the fortunes of either would leave the other in a stronger position.

17. It is possible, for instance, that Pham Hung has failed to move decisively against the group because the North Vietnamese politburo views it as a useful monitor inside COSVN. Looking toward the critical Tet Offensive of 1968, Le Duan may have favored elevating such cadres to positions essential to the success of the effort. If so, it would be wrong to suppose, as some sources do, that he is a steadfast ally of the southerners or the front-line veterans of COSVN.

Political and Personal Alignments

18. Reports concerning the so-called Tran Do group in COSVN touch on a number of issues, not the least of which is the relationship between political interests in Hanoi and COSVN. If, as the available evidence suggests, the 12 appointees have managed to hold onto their jobs, it seems reasonable to look for an explanation in either high-level complicity or patronage. On the other hand, the Tran Do group may owe its tenure to the support of other officials in Hanoi. suggests that Tran Do is a protege of Truong Chinh and that he and his 12 are working on behalf of his patron inside COSVN.

19. No evidence exists to bear out such a view of COSVN, although Tran Do is known to have worked as a journalist under Truong Chinh's tutelage in the early 1930s. Even if Hanoi rivalries do extend to the COSVN level, however, Le Duan would probably have little difficulty in covering his flank. All three members of the COSVN secretariat served with him in the south at one time or another and are reported to be at least receptive to his views.

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COSVN's experienced political organizer and former undersecretary, Vo Chi Cong, who is presently convalescing in Hanoi, also belonged to Duan's coterie in the early 1950s. The Party First Secretary, moreover, is said to have firm allies in the Deputy Commander of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, Nguyen Huu Xuyen Tam, and in Tran Bach Dang, the head of the Saigon committee whose wife is believed to have grown up with Le Duan's in Can Tho. Both of these men are reported to be among the most respected southerners on COSVN's Current Affairs Committee. In any potential showdown, the support of four of these individuals--and perhaps Pham Hung alone--could give Le Duan a decisive edge.

20. Apart from Tran Do, only one other top ranking COSVN figure has been portrayed as being potentially hostile to Le Duan. During the fight against France, Tran Van Tra, who was to become commander of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, served with Le Duan and became a member of his staff. At some point--and for unknown reasons--Tra reportedly developed a disliking for Duan. More recently, Tra suffered what appears to have been a professional setback. When Pham Hung took over COSVN in 1967 and began casting about for a new commander for the People's Liberation Armed Forces, he passed over Tra, who had been COSVN's undisputed senior military deputy up to that time.

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21. If Tra has indeed been sidetracked, his problems may well extend beyond Le Duan. From time to time he reportedly has acted as COSVN's political hatchet man, and at one point was accused falsely of murdering a fellow cadre. His enemies--and clearly he has them--are probably not limited to any one level or faction of the Communist bureaucracy. At the same time, however, he does appear to face opposition where it counts most. In particular, whatever his political credit in Hanoi, he is believed to be an alternate member of the Central Committee--it evidently has not been sufficient to assure him

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a logical promotion to COSVN's top military post. There is at least a possibility that his previous difficulties with the Party First Secretary have not been forgotten.

22. At the politburo level in North Vietnam only Le Duan and Troung Chinh can be linked even tenuously to a potential constituency within COSVN, although several of their colleagues apparently maintain some ties there. Hoang Van Thai, Commander of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, is said to be an old and devoted associate of Defense Minister Giap. Tran Van Tra may have been protected by a long-standing friendship with Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Vinh who, although not a politburo member, heads the party's Reunification Department. From 1966 until his death three years later, Ho Chi Minh is reported to have relied heavily on COSVN's second undersecretary, Hai Van, to mediate disputes within the Communist leadership and to keep him personally informed. Like Le Duan, Hanoi's chief Paris negotiator Le Duc Tho served as head of the Communist apparatus in the South during the 1950s, but there is no indication that he retains much of a personal following there.

Possible Policy Differences

23. How the COSVN leaders sort themselves out on broader issues of theory and strategy is equally obscure. As practitioners in the field they are probably more flexible in their commitment to doctrine than some of their counterparts in Hanoi. There is good evidence that COSVN's former chief, Nguyen Chi Thanh, was a firm believer in the decisive role of main-force units. Hoang Van Thai, his successor as commander of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, may or may not share this conviction. As a long time admirer of General Giap, Thai may prefer that main-force pressure be applied in gradual, measured doses, as his mentor has advocated. The fact that Thai has presided over a gradual winding down of the Communist main-force effort in the past two years may be a token of his strategic preferences as well as his flexibility.

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force tactics which the Communists have consistently emphasized since the appearance of COSVN Resolution 9 in June 1969.

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24. One other member of the COSVN hierarchy has been associated recently with a specific strategic line. [redacted] Tran Bach Dang was one of the foremost proponents of the urban offensives of 1968, which he apparently envisioned as a means of gaining political leverage in South Vietnam for the Communists. In mid-1970, he apparently again floated the idea. [redacted]

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[redacted] Dang traveled to Hanoi in late February 1970--just after a major policy address by Le Duan--to sound out Hanoi's leaders on various strategic problems. On his return [redacted] he circulated a series of taped briefings to top echelons in which he argued that equal emphasis should be given to rural and urban activities and that a general uprising in the cities was still a key element in Communist planning.

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25. It is unclear whether Dang's conviction was shared by his COSVN colleagues or accurately reflected Hanoi's policy at the time. But his views do not appear to have struck a responsive chord among leading cadres in the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam. In October 1970, General Le Trung Tin of Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue argued at length in a briefing [redacted]

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[redacted] that "a concentration of effort to dominate the cities is a mistake that prolongs the war." Tin may have been commenting simply on what he saw as the strategic realities in his own area, but the generalized nature of his remarks suggests that they may have been pitched to a wider audience.

26. According to most accounts from the Communists, there is little disagreement in COSVN over the political tactics prescribed by Hanoi, though apparently bickering does occur within various echelons over the proper mix of military and political activity. As one of COSVN's chief political officers, Tran Do has had a prominent hand in recent

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efforts to pare away some of the dead weight within the political hierarchy and to strengthen party control over the military. By most accounts, however, the chief architect of COSVN's political tactics has been Le Duan's old comrade, Vo Chi Cong, now in North Vietnam. While he was political officer for the central coastal provinces and a COSVN under-secretary (until 1966), Cong is said to have developed lines of approach to subversion and political agitation that have been held up as a model for the rest of South Vietnam.

27. Late in 1969 Communist reports on a "recent party congress" in the south carried sketchy references to briefings by Pham Hung and Hai Van. In the main, the two COSVN leaders were said simply to have elaborated upon Communist peace proposals made at Paris, with emphasis on the concepts of coalition government and cease-fire. Hai Van, however, apparently got into specifics, mentioning that the Communists would demand control of "six-tenths" of any prospective coalition government, including the ministries of Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs. Pham Hung, for his part, reportedly came out strongly in favor of developing an extensive legal cadre network as a hedge against the political infighting that he believed was inevitable between the time of a cease-fire and the emergence of a coalition. Though neither he nor Hai Van openly differed with official guidelines from Hanoi, each clearly had very specific ideas of his own about implementation.

28. During the past year, two pseudonyms associated with COSVN have appeared on propaganda articles which seem to give unusual emphasis to the role of main-force units. In December 1970, one "Tran Nam Trung" authored such a piece for the Liberation Press Agency, and another surfaced more recently in the same channel under the signature of "Cuu Long." Neither, however, provides much insight into possible factions or controversies in COSVN--or issues a clear call for greater main-force activity.

29. "Cuu Long" in fact is a pseudonym for an unidentified polemicist, or polemicists, for COSVN. Past pronouncements under this name, although sometimes contradictory, have generally been in line

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with official Hanoi views. "Tran Nam Trung"--supposedly the "defense minister" of the Communists' Provisional Revolutionary Government--is a cover name which has previously been used by Hoang Van Thai and his lieutenants Tran Van Tra and Tran Luong. Since this pseudonym is shared by the most powerful men in the military hierarchy--and potential rivals--its use probably indicates consensus rather than controversy at their level. Whether "Tran Nam Trung" has ever taken issue with Hanoi cannot be determined on the basis of available evidence, although "his" ambiguous pronouncements last year on the role of main-force units followed somewhat incongruously on the heels of a North Vietnamese propaganda campaign emphasizing the need for continued low-cost guerrilla warfare in the South. It is noteworthy that the current covert line passed from COSVN to the troops is to continue low-level military activity for the present, while concentrating on strengthening the over-all Communist position.

30. Recent US initiatives toward Peking and Moscow may have generated new tensions and some backbiting among COSVN leaders, but there is no way of telling with certainty who sided with whom. Only one member of the COSVN Standing Committee--deputy commander of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, Tran Luong--has been linked to strong anti-Chinese sentiments. Although the reason for his bias is not known, he is said to have been so outspoken about it that his career and influence in the leadership have been adversely affected. Another PLAF deputy, Nguyen Huu Xuyen Tam, is also believed to have been critical of China in the past, primarily because of concern over military training procedures there. Based on the evidence, neither Peking nor Moscow will automatically be backed--or criticized--by a single COSVN group.

Disciplinary Problems

31. Over the past two years Hanoi has introduced security measures in the south which may reflect concern over how COSVN and lower echelons are reacting to orders. The level of competence and

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discipline within the southern apparatus apparently began to decline noticeably during preparations for the Tet Offensive of 1968, when Communist ranks were considerably augmented with personnel who had not undergone prolonged indoctrination and training. Later, after the offensives had run their course--and as the Communists began to shift toward less costly tactics--the effects of these earlier augmentations, [redacted]

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[redacted] began to be felt even within the upper levels of the cadre structure. In 1969 Hanoi created Control Sections and Inspection Committees throughout the southern hierarchy in an apparent effort to weed out the incompetents and shore up internal security. The North Vietnamese also reportedly expanded the number of cadres assigned to COSVN under cover--usually as members of medical teams--to monitor the activities of the leadership there. More recently, a former North Vietnamese interior minister with wide experience in party disciplinary activities was assigned to COSVN in an unspecified capacity. His posting may be part of a further effort by Hanoi to ensure discipline at the COSVN level.

32. COSVN itself has consistently shown concern over the responsiveness of its immediate staff elements. Following a COSVN conference in August 1968, the enemy high command removed a number of second-echelon staff members who had come out at the meeting against the COSVN assessment that the offensives earlier in the year had been a "political victory." Though none of the conferees apparently had contested what was said to have been the underlying premise of the offensives--that a "general uprising" was feasible in South Vietnam--even Tran Van Tra and Hoang Van Thai reportedly had conceded during the meeting that the necessary political groundwork had not been done in the cities. According to one report, one half of the conferees had supported the dissenting view that the offensives had been too costly and that the apparent gains from them had not offset the losses in manpower and material.

33. In still another internal contretemp, a high-level COSVN official in late 1969 fired off a letter to a Communist commander and COSVN staffer

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in the northern delta criticizing him for not following party guidelines on economy-of-force tactics. Likewise, in early 1970, a promising young party leader from a sub-region near Saigon, who held a concurrent COSVN staff position, openly contested the COSVN view that current strategy would soon lead to a favorable political solution. Similar doubts have been expressed recently by cadres in the northernmost provinces of the country who operate under the guidance of COSVN detachees though not under COSVN itself. Such dissidence at the working level may not immediately affect relations between Hanoi and its top representatives in the south, but clearly it could limit the latter's ability to put North Vietnamese policy into effect.

Conclusion

34. Although details are lacking, the evidence suggests that there are tensions--sometimes pronounced and divisive--within the Communist command structure. Past evidence on internal rivalries has often shown these differences to be more bureaucratic than political, with cadres from Central Vietnam at odds with those from the Saigon area and southern-based veterans arguing with recent arrivals from the north about promotion procedures within the system. It is conceivable that malcontents may occasionally cast their complaints in regional or ideological terms in order to win support, thus distorting and confusing the lines of debate on broader issues.

35. There is an outside chance that rivalries in the Hanoi Politburo have been projected into COSVN through Tran Do and his entourage. Moreover, though none of the COSVN cadres has openly differed with Hanoi, certain changes in COSVN's security measures would seem to indicate that the North Vietnamese are taking no chances on this score. Some slackening of discipline has been reported at levels just below COSVN and within its own staff structure.

36. Although COSVN is far from a hotbed of controversy, its leaders are preoccupied with often parochial and conflicting interests. So long as

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their attention remains divided it seems reasonable to suppose that they may be limited in their ability to pick up the initiative when events overtake the latest directives from Hanoi.



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